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Singapore Fiasco

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The recent Singapore spy story is a tragicomic fiasco. It is a maze of venality and fumbling and power politics. Agent 007 might have liked it, but he probably wouldn't have been able to figure it out.

Here's the state department first denying, then admitting, that it once offered a \$3.3 million bribe to Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. The money was an inducement for Mr. Lee to keep his mouth shut about a bungled Central Intelligence Agency operation in Singapore.

But Mr. Lee is no cheapskate. He demanded instead \$33 million — that's right \$33 million.

The CIA hid under its cloak at this, hoping everything would go away. That was just too much taxpayers' dough to hand over, whatever the reason. This was in 1960. Now—seemingly inspired by personal anti-United States pique and the glowering proximity of Red China — Mr. Lee has spilled the beans.

Oh, no, the state department said, the bribe incident never occurred. Mr. Lee accordingly produced a letter from the state department's boss — Dean Rusk himself—showing it did, and even apologizing for the CIA's skullduggery. Oops, said the state department.

Thus once again—a la U-2 incident —the United States is caught in an official lie, compliments of the state department. So here's a memo to that esteemed agency:

1. Never put it in writing—if you don't want it waved in your face later.
2. Try using "no comment," especially where intelligence matters are concerned.
3. It's a crying shame that you don't know these things already.

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